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presentations skills

presentations for business, sales, and training - oral and multimedia

Presentations skills are very useful - for business, sales, training, public speaking and self-development. Presentations format, media and purpose vary a lot - oral, multimedia, powerpoint presentations, short impromptu presentations, long planned presentations - but every successful presentation uses the principles explained here. Aside from presentations techniques, confidence and experience are big factors. You are not alone if the thought of speaking in public scares you. Giving a presentation is worrying for many people. Presenting or speaking to an audience regularly tops the list in surveys of people's top fears - more than heights, flying or dying. Put another way, "Most people would prefer to be lying in the casket than giving the eulogy" (ack. Michelle Ray).

A common physical reaction to having to speak in public is a release of adrenaline and cortisol into our system the equivalent to drinking seven cups of coffee. Our primitive brain shuts down normal functions as the 'fight or flight' impulse takes over. (See FEAR under the [acronyms](#) section.)

But don't worry - your audience wants you to succeed. They're on your side. They're glad it's you up there and not them. All you need to do is follow the guidelines contained on this page, and everything will be fine. Don't try to get rid of the butterflies - just get them flying in formation.

Good preparation is the key to confidence, which is the key to you being relaxed.

Good preparation and rehearsal will reduce your nerves by 75%, increase the likelihood of avoiding errors to 95%, and let's face it, your audience will know if you've not done it. (presentations statistics from Fred Pryor Organisation)

presentations theory

Preparation and knowledge are the pre-requisites for a successful presentation, but confidence and control are just as important. Remember and apply Eleanor Roosevelt's maxim that "no-one can intimidate me without my permission".

Remember also that "*Depth of conviction* counts more than *height of logic*, and *enthusiasm* is worth more than *knowledge*". (David Peebles)

Good presenting is about *entertaining* as well as conveying information. As well, people retain more if they are enjoying themselves and feeling relaxed.

You have 4 - 7 seconds in which to make a positive impact and good opening impression, so make sure you have a good, strong, solid introduction, and rehearse it to death. Try to build your own credibility and create a safe comfortable environment for your audience. Smiling helps...

Don't start with a joke - it will almost certainly bomb. Don't apologise for anything first off (ideally never), and start on time.

The average attention span of an average listener is only 6-8 minutes, so intersperse your material with 'spice' and a variety of stimuli, media and movement to maintain maximum interest.

Memorise a couple of good quotations (see the [quotations](#) section), and always credit the source. (Bobby Kennedy is remembered for committing the unforgiveable in failing to credit George Bernard Shaw when he said that "Some men see things as they are and ask 'why?'; I dare to dream of things that never were and ask 'why not?'.")

Having quotes and other devices is important to give your presentation depth and texture, as well as keeping your audience interested. "If the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer you'll treat everything as a nail." (Abraham Maslow)

Be daring and bold and have fun. Use props and pass them around if you can. The more senses you can stimulate the more fun your audience will have and the more they'll remember.

Create analogies and themes, and use props to illustrate and reinforce them. (The best prop of all is a bag of fresh lemons: they look great, they smell great, they feel great, and they're cheap, so you can give out loads and not ask for them back - all you have to do is think of an excuse to use them!)

Examples of 'spice' that you can use to bring your presentation to life, and keep your audience attentive and enjoying themselves:

- Stories
- Questions
- Pictures, cartoons and video-clips
- Sound-clips
- Straw polls
- Audience participation exercises
- Quotations
- Props (see the [visual aids ideas page](#))
- Examples
- Analogies
- Statistics (which dramatically improve audience 'buy-in' if you're trying to persuade)
- and your body language, and the changing tone and pitch of your voice.

For longer presentations, if you're not an experienced speaker, you must schedule a break every 45 minutes or so for people to get up and stretch their legs, otherwise you'll be losing them regardless of the amount of spice you include.

Take the pressure off yourself by not speaking all the time. Get the audience doing things, and make use of all the communications senses available.

For instance; the use of visual aids generally heightens retention of the spoken word by up to 70%.

Tony Buzan's figures on the subject of information retention are:

Read 10% - Heard 20% - Seen 30% - Heard and Seen 50% - Said 70% - Said and Done 90%.

For printed visual aids with several paragraphs of text, use serif fonts (a font is a typeface) for quicker readability. For computer and LCD projectors use sans serif fonts, especially if the point size (letter size) is too small. Arial is a sans serif font. Times is a serif font. (A serif font is one with the extra little cross-lines which finish off the strokes of the letters. Interestingly, serif fonts originated in the days of engraving, before printing, when the engraver needed an exit point from each letter.)

Extensive sections of text can be read more quickly in serif font because the words have a horizontal flow, but serif fonts have a more old-fashioned traditional appearance than sans serif. If you need to comply with a company type-style you'll maybe have no choice anyway. Whatever - try to select fonts and point sizes that are fit for the medium and purpose.

Use no more than two different fonts and no more than two size/bold/italic variants or the whole thing becomes confused. If in doubt simply pick a good readable serif font and use it big and bold for headings, and 14 - 16 point size for the body text.

Absolutely avoid upper case (capital letters) in body text, because people need to be able to read word-shapes as well as the letters, and of course upper case makes every word a rectangle, so it takes ages to read. Upper case is just about okay for headings if you really have to.

See ['tricks of the trade'](#) in the marketing and advertising section for lots of tips and secrets about presenting the written word.

Create your own prompts and notes - whatever suits you best. Cue cards are fine but make sure to number them and tie them together in order. A single sheet at-a-glance timetable is a great safety-net for anything longer than half an hour. You can use this to monitor your timing and pace.

preparation - creating your presentation

Think about your audience, your aims, their expectations, the surroundings, the facilities available, and what type of presentation you are going to give (lecture style, informative, participative, etc).

What are your aims? To inform, inspire and entertain, maybe to demonstrate and prove, and maybe to persuade.

How do you want the audience to react?

Thinking about these things will help you ensure that your presentation is going to achieve its purpose.

Clearly identify your subject and your purpose to yourself, and then let the creative process take over for a while to gather all the possible ideas for subject matter and how you could present it. Use brainstorming and mind-mapping.

Both processes involve freely putting random ideas and connections down on a piece of paper -

the bigger the better - using different coloured big felt pens will help too. Don't write lists and don't try to write the presentation until you have picked the content and created a rough structure from your random collected ideas and material. See the section on [brainstorming](#).

When you have all your ideas on paper, organise them into subject matter categories, three is best. Does it flow? Is there a logical sequence that people will follow and you'll be comfortable with?

Use the rule of three to structure the presentation; it has a natural balance and flow. A simple approach is to have three main sections. Each section has three sub-sections. Each of these can have three sub-sections, and so on. A 30 minute presentation is unlikely to need more than three sections, with three sub-sections each. A three day training course presentation need have no more than four levels of three, giving 81 sub-sections in all. Simple!

Presentations almost always take longer to deliver than you think the material will last.

You must create a strong introduction and a strong close.

You must tell people what you're going to speak about and what your purpose is.

And while you might end on a stirring quotation or a stunning statistic, you must before this have summarised what you have spoken about and if appropriate, demanded an action from your audience, even if it is to go away and think about what you have said.

Essentially the structure of all good presentations is to:

"Tell'em what you're gonna tell'em. Tell'em. Then tell'em what you told'em." (George Bernard Shaw - thanks Neville Toptani)

When you have structured your presentation, it will have an opening, a middle with headed sections of subject matter, and a close, with opportunity for questions if relevant. This is still a flat '2D' script.

Practice it in its rough form.

Next you give it a 3rd Dimension by blending in your presentation method. This entails the equipment and materials you use, case studies, examples, quotations, analogies, questions and answers, individual and syndicate exercises, interesting statistics, and any kind of presentation aid you think will work.

Practice it in rough 3D form. Get a feel for the timing. Amend and refine it. This practice is essential to build your competence and confidence, and also to practice the pace and timing. You'll be amazed at how much longer the presentation takes than you think it will.

Ask an honest and tactful friend to listen and watch you practice. Ask for their comments about how you can improve, especially your body position and movement, your pace and voice, and whether they understood everything. If they can't make at least a half a dozen constructive suggestions ask someone else.

Produce the presentation materials and organise the equipment, and ensure you are comfortable with your method of cribbing from notes, cards etc.

Practice it in its refined 3D form. Amend and refine if necessary, and if possible have a final run-through in the real setting if it's strange to you.

Take nothing for granted. Check and double-check, and plan contingencies for anything that might go wrong.

Plan and control the layout of the room as much as you are able. If you are a speaker at someone else's event you'll not have much of a say in this, but if it's your event then take care to position yourself, your equipment and your audience and the seating plan so that it suits you and the situation. For instance, don't lay out a room theatre-style if you want people to participate in teams. Use a boardroom layout if you want a co-operative debating approach.

Make sure everyone can see the visual displays.

Make sure you understand and if appropriate control and convey the domestic arrangements (fire drill, catering, smoking, messages, breaks etc.)

For more detailed advice about training, presentations and conference arrangements please [get in touch](#).

delivering your presentation

Relax, have a rock-solid practiced opening, and smile. Be firm, be confident and be in control; the floor is yours, and the audience is on your side.

Introduce yourself and tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them why you're telling them it; why it's important, and why it's you that's telling them. Tell them how long you're going to take, and tell them when they can ask questions (if you're nervous about being thrown off-track then it's okay to ask them save their questions until the end).

By the time you've done this introduction you've established your authority, created respect and credibility, and overcome the worst of your nerves. You might even be enjoying it; it happens. If you're just giving a short presentation then by the time you've done all this you've completed a quarter of it!

Remember, if you are truly scared, the only way to overcome your fear is just to do it. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." (Friedrich Nietzsche)

Remember also, initial impact is made and audience mood towards you is established in the first 4-7 seconds.

Be aware of your own body language and remember what advice you got from your friend on your practice run. You are the most powerful visual aid of all, so use your body movement and position well. Don't stand in front of the screen when the projector is on.

If people talk amongst themselves just stop and look at them. Say nothing, just look. You will be amazed at the effect, and how quickly your authority increases. (This silent tactic works with an entire unsettled audience too.)

If you want a respite or some thinking time, asking the audience a question or involving them in an exercise takes the pressure off you, and gives you a bit of breathing space.

Pausing is fine. It always seems like an age when you're up there, but the audience won't notice unless you start umming-and-aahing. Knowing that a pause now and then is perfectly fine will help you to concentrate on what you're saying next, rather than the pause.

Keep control, no-one will question your authority when you have the floor, so don't give it

up.

If you don't know the answer to a question say so and deal with it later. You have the right to defer questions until the end (on the grounds that you may well be covering it in the presentation later anyway, or just simply because you say so).

Close positively and firmly, and accept plaudits graciously.

creating and giving presentations - step by step guide

1. define purpose
2. gather content and presentation ideas
3. structure the subject matter
4. develop how to present it
5. prepare presentation
6. practice
7. plan, experience, control the environment
8. 'dress rehearsal' if warranted

prepare the presentation

Points to remember: why are you presenting? what's the purpose? to whom? how? when and where?, audience, venue, aims, equipment, media, subject, outcome aim, audience reaction aim, type of presentation, brainstorm, mind-map, random subject-matter collection, be innovative and daring, what's the WIIFM for your audience (the 'what's in it for me' factor - see acronyms), materials, media, exercises, gather spice, case-studies, statistics, props, quotations, analogies, participation, syndicates, anticipate questions, know your knowledge-base and reference points, decide your prompt system - cue cards, notes, whatever suits you best.

create and design the presentation

Points to remember: plan the structure, tell'em what you're gonna tell'em, tell'em, tell'em what you told'em, rule of three, intro, close and middle, create your headings and sub-headings, assemble and slot in your subject-matter, spice and activities, plan early impact and to create a credible impression, consider attention spans and audience profile to get the language and tone right, add spice every 5-10 minutes, build the presentation, prepare equipment, prepare materials and props, create your prompts or notes, dry-run practice, timings, create fall-back contingencies, practice, get feed-back, refine, practice and practice.

deliver the presentation

Relax, you have practiced and prepared so nothing will go wrong, enjoy it, the audience is on your side.

Points to remember: smile, solid well-rehearsed opening, impact, tell'em what you're gonna tell'em, tell'em, tell'em what you told'em, entertainment, interest, body-language, humour, control, firmness, confidence, avoid jokes/sexism/racism, speak your audience's language, accentuate the positive, use prompts, participation, and have fun!

See the [visual aids ideas page](#)

Lots more training and development ideas on the [main businessballs website](#) if you are not already there

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